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New Year's Message

to

the Canadian People

by

His Excellency

General the Right Honourable

Georges P. Vanier

Governor-General of Canada

1st January 1966

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To all Canadians, wherever they may be, I send a message, in which my wife joins, of good cheer and best wishes for health and happiness during the New Year, and for many years to come.

New Year's Day is not only an appropriate time for making resolutions, but equally for having a look at our present and past.

According to statistics published recently by economic experts, Canada is the most affluent state in the world. At first sight this would appear comforting, but it also gives food for serious reflection.

I wonder how many Canadians realize that on a per capita basis we are the richest nation in the world? We have only scratched the surface of our natural resources; we may be sure that vast new treasures still await discovery. The fact that our population is less than 20 million, while our neighbours number approximately 195 million, will give you some idea of our wealth. But this alone is certainly nothing to boast about.

What have we done to earn such blessings? What are we doing to be worthy of such an inheritance? Remember that of those to whom much is given, much will be required.

How *can* we become worthy? I believe: by a healthy respect for good hard work. Our forefathers had it; they opened up this land with the old-fashioned honourable sweat of their brows and the determination of their hearts. But I wonder if the virtues of our forbears are not slipping a little from our grasp. I wonder if we are not forgetting that all the richness of our heritage owed its beginning to, and can only be preserved by, conscious effort and dedicated service. The very ease and comfort of our lives today have lulled us into forgetfulness of those very virtues which have made our present standards possible.

Consider the names of scholarship winners at our universities. There you will find an amazing proportion—a proportion out of all relation to their numbers—of names of young people who are not members of our founding peoples. I salute them, I congratulate them for their present achievement and for the success they will have in the future. By their hard work they are setting an example which should be followed by those who have been in our Country much longer.

Affluence in our society can be our servant or our master. It can make us slaves of pettiness and purposeless living, or by refreshing within us the sources of charity and love, can make us richer not only materially but richer in heart and mind and spirit as well.

Oh, what a responsibility affluence carries with it—a responsibility not only to our people but to all humanity, to those who are handicapped, to those who are miserable, to those who are hungry.

We must resolve that the principles our forefathers exemplified will guide our work and rekindle within us the force of determination to give worth and meaning to our lives.

There is something else I would like to speak to you about. I sometimes hear it said that Canada is a country without an identity. It is an idea, curiously enough, that is only found within Canada—never abroad. During the 30 years, that I represented this Country overseas, let me assure you that no identity was better recognized or respected than was the Canadian. Our reputation for fairness, good judgment and for understanding without bias, was a source of immense prestige for anyone fortunate enough to represent Canada. We are known as a people with no axe to grind, without a frontier hate complex. Whenever an international

committee was looking for a member, Canadian officials were in demand. I can vouch that the rest of the world believes that there *is* a Canadian identity. To people throughout the world, Canada gives an image of solidarity. In fact there is a Canadian identity which is an "open sesame".

I am in a position to declare that, not only in peace but in war as well, Canadians have shown they can leave a name, they can achieve an enviable reputation, among the nations. In two World Wars we were able to mobilize over 1½ million men and women. Yes, if you have any doubt about Canadian identity, come with me to Ypres, Vimy, Courcellette, Passchendaele, Dieppe, Ortona, and so many other battlefields. There you will find 110,000 Canadians from all Provinces, lying side by side, who gave their lives in the defence of liberty and justice. Do you think they would have been willing to make the supreme sacrifice had they been an anonymous conglomeration without the tie of brotherhood, of countryhood?

We need to cherish and respect our identity. We must seek those values in our national life which have won for us so invaluable a name in the councils of the world. We must concentrate on the development of mutual trust and understanding, of mutual affection and fraternity, that alone can make us the united country we must be.

In the development of our national life, let us not always argue about *who* is right, but simply *what* is right; what course is fair and just; what course will lead to the common good. Only as we approach problems in this honourable way, will we be worthy of the esteem with which we are held abroad. Only as we live up to the image that other nations have of Canada will the world's faith and trust in us be fulfilled. I am tired of hearing people around me

say and write that we are a lot of rudderless people on the road to nowhere. We *have* a Canadian identity, we must begin to live up to the high standard it embodies.

The affluence of our society, of which I spoke earlier, gives us a sort of smug self-satisfaction which finds its expression sometimes in another word: apathy.

Need I remind you of what happens when apathy in public affairs becomes widespread: community leadership falls into the hands of the demagogue and the opportunist. The history of man tells the tale of great empires which fell, not from outward assault but from inward decay and moral disintegration.

If we are to combat this drift towards apathy we must begin with our youth. More than half of all Canadians today are younger than 22. The need for firm guidance and inspired teaching by their elders is now more essential than it has ever been, not only for youth's own well-being but for the very future of our Country.

We live in an age of moral uncertainty. Many traditional social beliefs have been challenged and cast into doubt. The result has been a temptation among parents to abdicate responsibility in the formation of their children's minds.


The youth of our Country appear to be dissatisfied with us, their parents. I don't blame them. I am not very proud of what we have done—or perhaps left undone.

Are we giving them the guidance they require, the inspiration they should have if they are to attain fulfilment? Are we giving them a cause to which they can dedicate their efforts, a cause which will bring out all that is noble within them? Or could it be that we are obsessed with goals that are far from noble, with material causes which offer nothing but emptiness to the spirit? How often in the emptiness of our society do the brave young shoots of nobility and com-

passion wither and die on the barren ground of material values.

Let us give some thought to discipline as a remedy. Discipline is a quality which must be taught. It is not something which we can expect our young people to come upon by accident or introspection. A large part of this teaching is the parents' responsibility, but we are fortunate in this Country in having many devoted service organizations which will help our young people to learn this essential first step. The Boy Scouts, Girl Guides, 4-H Clubs, Y.M. and Y.W.C.A.'s, Company of Young Canadians, church youth groups, Commonwealth Youth Movement, cadet and other organizations are making an essential contribution to the formation of the young men and women in whose hands the future of our Country lies. These organizations deserve our unqualified support. Every young person owes it not only to his Country but to himself to participate wholeheartedly in one of them. I appeal to youth to develop a sense of personal discipline. To fail to do so, to fail to learn the wisdom of self-discipline, means failure to become a mature and civilized person.

To all Canadians I say: lift up our hearts, let us shape our lives in such a way as to fulfil the prodigious destiny to which Providence beckons us. Let us go forward in understanding and in unity.



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